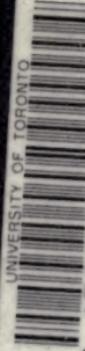


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No. 5.

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THE IRON AGE

ADVENTURERS All.

A SERIES
OF
YOUNG
POETS

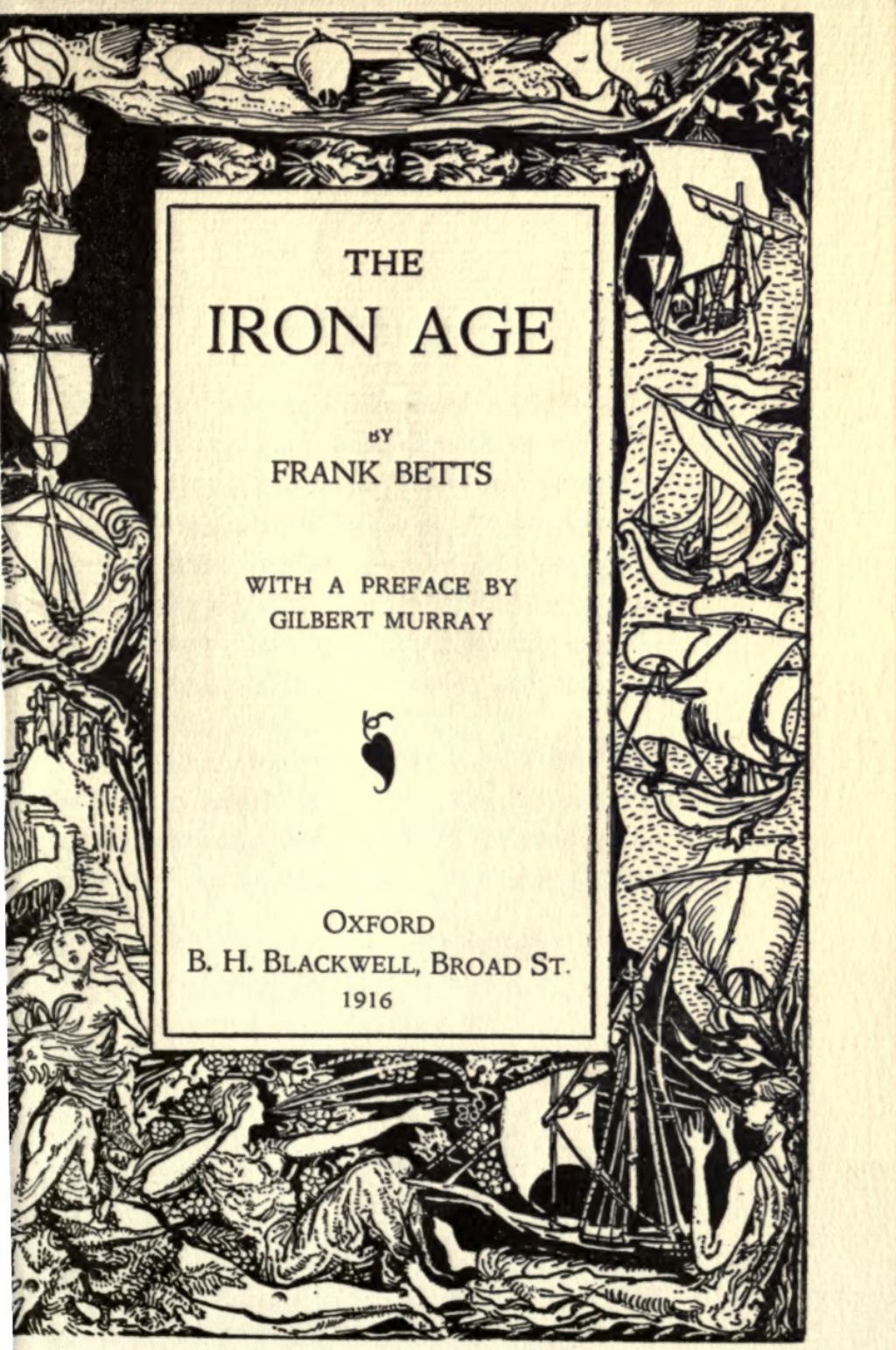


MY OWN
TO
FAME.

COME MY FRIENDS...
'TIS NOT TOO LATE TO SEEK
A NEWER WORLD. IT MAY
BE THAT THE GULFS WILL WASH
US DOWN... IT MAY BE WE
SHALL TOUCH THE HAPPY
ISLES ~ YET OUR PURPOSE
HOLDS... TO SAIL BEYOND
THE SUNSET. ~
ULYSSES

YOUNG
POETS

THE
LITERARY
STORY. II. MACCABEES
XV. 1892.



THE IRON AGE

BY
FRANK BETTS

WITH A PREFACE BY
GILBERT MURRAY



OXFORD
B. H. BLACKWELL, BROAD ST.
1916

PR
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PREFACE.

FOR many years past Mr. Betts' unpublished work has been a source of great pleasure to me. I never knew when next it might "blow in," or what new subject it would have swept into its range during the interval. But it was always sure to be full of life and power and sympathy, and curious erudition penetrated by imaginative brooding. And, whether one liked it or not, it was indifferent to fashion and free from the leaven of the scribes.

I am sorry the present book is so short. For Mr. Betts is an author who is best read in the mass and not in specimens, and I should have liked readers to know him by his *Saga-plays*. But after all that can come later.

G. M.

DEDICATION.

TO ERNEST COWARD.

IN Whiteley woods the South winds blow
Heather scent from Ringinglow ;
In Whiteley woods we two have seen
The pale June night's uncertain sheen—
For how could we two fare to bed
With so much crying to be said
After so long, on either part
Of Aeschylus and of Mozart ?
Men say the dreams of twenty-two
The winds of thirty shall undo—
We prove them liars, do we not ?
Which of our dreams have we forgot ?
Not this, the lordliest hope on earth
To bring new loveliness to birth—
Oh, you when heart and hope had lacked
Have cheered me here in Pontefract

And

And I wish you joy, blue skies or brown,
Music-making in Canning Town.
Triumph? who know? to serve and strive
Enough for any man alive!
Oh, I were proud to hear your name
Made equal with your father's fame,
And if goodwill good luck could bring
Why now, I were the peer of Synge.
It lies not in our hands: but this
At least, that we need never miss
This triumph life can not deny
To serve and strive until we die!

1914.

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THE MAGI.

TWO Kings, proud in purple,
Crowned with burning gold,
Weighed down their labouring camels
With treasure manifold.

Two Kings rode down the ways of the world
On an errand wild and far
Over the Eastern deserts
Following a star.

Their lords rode beside them,
Wondering and amazed,
Over the Eastern deserts,
Where the strange star blazed.

I also looked and wondered
At the comet's boding hair
And I sought a meaning in my scrolls
Nor found it there.

THE MAGI 

I left my crumbling castle,
Where Oxus flows,
For the stony paths of the uplands
And the eternal snows.

No such gift as the other twain
Could I bear ;
No gold and no frankincense
A little myrrh.

With me no wondering princes,
Rode at my bridle rein :
No lords following my banner,
O'er the burning plain.

A summer and a winter
After the ride began,
Ere I reached the abiding of the star
And the crowded khan.

The Lady was pale and gentle
Fairer was never seen,
And the Star waited over the Child's head
The Child of a queen.

THE MAGI

Narrow was the Child's bed—
O he was fair
When He laughed at the sound of psalteries
In the echoing air!

Lady and Child were gracious
And fair to see,
Like a Queen she welcomed the other twain
And welcomed me,

Like a Queen she took the treasure
Of the other twain,
Nor was the myrrh I offered
Offered in vain.

And I turned homeward, haunted
By the Lady's eyes,
And the shadow of foreknowledge
Sad and wise.

I rode back across the desert
And the ancient streams,
And methought I shared her knowledge
And dreamed her dreams.

THE MAGI

I forded the Euphrates
Rushing to my knee,
And I was mazed in the dreams
That haunted me.

Thronged with visions
That waver and go,
I rode in the shade of Ararat
And the chill of its snow.

As I passed alone by the Caspian
And its natron-crusted sand,
With desert and desert waters
On either hand—

As I rode the pathless upland
Pathless and blind,
A dream of One crowned—not as I am crowned—
Passed through my mind.

Crowned not with gold,
Crowned with thorn,
Girt not with purple and pride
Forlorn

THE] MAGI

I have searched my ancient scrolls
To read the dream,
And I have pondered it in my crumbling tower
By Oxus stream.

I saw Three nailed in torment
By the soldiers of Rome ;
And in vain I sought to read the dream
In the scrolls pondered at home.

The Lords of the World in purple
And their hosts of war,
Watched maidens cast before lions
On a bloodstained floor.

And I saw white temples ruined
And groves aflame,
¶ As I rode the desert dreaming :
And still dreams came.

I saw the Eagle and Raven
For an hour proud
But I could not read the standard
When their pride was bowed.

THE MAGI  

On strange towers my vision
Saw the same standard shine,
And bells called out o'er the city
From the glimmering shrine.

Words I heard spoken
Over the bread and wine
But no glimmer of the meaning
Could I divine.

I saw a chalice lifted
And wine blood red
And the people bowed on their faces
As men dead.

And I saw bright horsemen riding
With golden helm ablaze
Across the shadowed woodland
On magic ways.

Wild with the breaking of the snows,
White with whirling froth,
Oxus burst from out the hills
And turned to the North.

THE MAGI

And the dreams grew harsh and troubled
Fire-red and grim
And I grasped at a flying meaning
Changing and dim.

Men strove, and they that vaunted
The Lady's part
Drove their swords and lances
Into her heart;

All they that made semblance
To stand on the Child's part
Smote with poisoned lances
Into His heart.

O sore was the dream and troubled
As I rode by Samarcand,
With green palms and green waters
On either hand.

The market thronged and sounded
With a freighted caravan;
I heeded not the merchants
In the crowded khan.

THE MAGI 

The silks and Orient spices
They spread in the market place
I saw beyond the chaffering
The Lady's face.

And I heard by her truest lovers
Their Queen denied,
And I saw the bale fires burning
Where true men died.

And I rode, it seemed, for ever
Northward along the stream
And for every league of journeying
A weary dream.

Till I saw far off, o'er a river bend,
Threshed by desert sand,
Ruinous and solitary,
My castle stand.

And the dream rolled on and hid it
From my sight
Darker was never shaken
From the wings of night.

THE MAGI

Pale was the sun, to my seeming,
And the heavens blood red,
And a trumpet called in the silence
Living and dead.

Living and dead thronged the desert
In the blood red glare,
That the calling of the trumpet
Gathered there.

And One crowned in the heavens,
With a burning sword
And He seemed to my fantasy
The Child I had adored.

And I rode my castle gateway
In the breaking of the dream
And behold, the empty desert
And the swollen stream!

Nightly in my turret
I remember Child and Queen
And I brood upon my visions
What they may mean.

THE MAGI 

Nightly I search the stars
Afraid, alone,
And my desolate castle crumbles
Stone by stone.

Far off the merchants chaffer,
The armies ride,
And Oxus runs by my castle
Empty and wide.

1913.

HELLAS.

THE DEATHLESS.

THE Gods are great and silent : they abide
 Unmoved in highest heaven and behold
On the wild surf of time's resistless tide,
The dreams and hopes and fears of mortals rolled.

Clear corridors and columned palaces
Are theirs, and stately halls of echoing song,
Where all the changing day they take their ease
And banquet carelessly the ages long.

With gold and Delphian laurel garlanded
Upon their carven couches they recline,
Arrayed in lordlier than the Tyrian red
And drain from jewelled cups immortal wine.

Daily the swiftfoot Dawn with streaming hair
Before the splendid sun's tremendous car
Opens the Eastern gate and lights the fair
Brief lustrous lamp of the white morning star.

THE DEATHLESS

Daily the mighty Sun returns from spilling
Through all the air his vase of perfect fire,
Ocean to ocean the long path fulfilling
Back to the palaces of his desire.

Before their eyes with light of silver burning
The Moon ariseth lightly from her seat,
Nightly at moonset to the couch returning
From the pale pathway with unwearied feet.

Theirs is the perfect quiet and the rest
With perfect beauty and solemnity,
And vision of all worlds and ages blest
While the light-footed mortal seasons flee.

The woven web and tapestries of Time
Wrought here with pomp of some infatuate king
And there with dens of misery and crime
Are theirs: the whole to them is as one thing.

They see the hopes of mortals in the flower,
They are not glad: they weep not, yet they know
That the light passage of a single hour
Will lay the sweet and fruitless blossom low.

THE DEATHLESS



They see the heart that sins, the heart that sins not :
Alike to them are blasphemy and praise—
The cry of all the suffering nations wins not
To touch the dreaming silence of their days.

Yea, and they see across a restless sea
Storm-riven ships pursue their hopeless way—
They see pale lovers meeting solemnly
Beneath green branches, happier than they.

They know not of delight nor of mutation
They know not of desire or any care :
Bring not to them your offering or oblation
What heed have they of penitence or prayer ?

From the great heights the Gods behold our passion
And from afar our dreams of fading fire :
They sit above delight, above compassion
And above rapture, and beyond desire.

O light unshadowed and unwavering
Unpassionate hearts in seats unpassionate,
Is not all weary that the slow years bring ?
Are not your holy places desolate ?

THE DEATHLESS

For we, beneath the lifted sword of Death,
We, whose unstable days so soon take flight,
Dreams of a shadow, wavering human breath,
Would never choose your shadowless delight.

Ah love! one thing on earth, in heaven be mine
Silence amid the deep wood's secrecy—
Desire and dream surpass their calm divine
And life and death their immortality.

1904.

DIONYSOS IN INDE.

The Rajput horsemen bear tidings to the Brahmans of the coming
of outland folk.

T RACKLESS the Northern forest, stainless the North-
ern snow

And beneath in glen and garden year-long the roses
blow :

Mighty the sweep of the rivers to the meadows glad
with grain

And the throng of the kine in the pastures, and the
many-cited plain :

Here is the land of Agni and here the Sacrifice
Is daily wrought by the Masters in the Holy Ancient
wise.

Calm, O calm is the Middle Land, happy and warded
well

By cragg and cliff and torrent and swords most terrible.
And the love of the most High Gods and the power of
the Ancient Rite :

And ever the chant and the offering welcome the morn-
ing light.

It is well : what hath been ever, shall endure eternally

DIONYSOS IN INDE

Peace in the land and wisdom: it is nothing, let it be
The rumour and sound of storm, the folly from afar
A thousand miles where the Khyber lies dusk neath
the evening star

The mail-clad Guards of the Khyber and the ancient
gates of war—
“Dionysos.”

The unclean outer peoples, like the waves of the hate-
ful sea

Rage neath an angry heaven, tormented endlessly,
Hither and thither swept down deadly paths and
strange:

But the Land of the Holy Cities shall know no breath
of change.

Often and often we heard them, rumour and threatening
Of deeds toward in the Marches and the wrath of an
outland king;

We have learned to heed them little and much to heed
the Rite,

The words our fathers taught us and the Sacrifice of
might,

The Rite that sways the Seasons, the rains and suns
that bless,

DIONYSOS IN INDE

That sways the stars of heaven with its great steadfastness—
Small gain, O mail-clad wardens, who ride so fast and far
To bear us a madman's raving and the lies of the bazaar
From the iron cliffs of the Khyber and the ancient gates of war.

Old the tale and idle of the Afghan rievers' woe,
Swords ablaze in the outlands and strife in the Afghan snow ;
They have ridden oft, the mighty, and well may they ride again
And find their death in the passes that open to the plain—
And ye have swords to meet them and high the Rajput mood
That wards the Land of the Rivers where the Masters of Wisdom brood.
The Kings may ride to the onslaught in their majesty and greed
We have found your hearts and lances stark in the hour of need



And the Silent Gods are watchers o'er the peace of the
Holy Stream

Yet ye fear a foolish wonder and the marvels of a
dream—

Fire, ye say, in the passes and a song in the heart of
the fire

That rends the outer peoples and calls to the heart's
desire.

And they follow and none may withstand them, a
storm lured on by a star,

Hosts from the cities of Iran, from Balkh and Kan-
dahar—

It is yours to hold the Khyber and the ancient gates of
war.

“Dionysos.”

Little ye feared the arrows and the unclean Tartar
hordes

And the might of the Mede embattled shrank from
your eager swords,

“But these—their mail the fawnskin and the tangled
ivy crown

DIONYSOS IN INDE

And their vine-wreathed wands more dreadful than the
swords of old renown ;
Their van the wild-heart maidens, white bosomed,
white of hand,
And the thunder of their onset no serried spears with-
stand,
And the terror that rides before them, and the frenzied
revelry
That has torn the outer peoples from the shore of the
Western Sea :
The wild rock-carven gorges echo the Maenad tread,
And a very God is among them, laughing and gar-
landed
With the breath of sacred vine leaf and the berried ivy
twine
And he bears a gift of renewal and the wonder of the
vine,
And fleet are the fawning panthers that draw his ivory
car.”
—The High Gods know him not—the stranger from
afar,
It is yours to hold the Khyber, and the ancient gates of
war.

“Dionysos.”

“There is change and wonder behind him : the ravening desert sand
Bursts into glory of blossom at the tread of his hurrying band.
Grim are the Afghan passes : yet the iron gorges shine
With tangled breadth of vine leaf and the promise of the vine,
And the eyes of the folk are eager that were heavy overlong,
And a wilder beat is throbbing in the heart of the harvest song.
A cry is abroad in the nations and a stir of marvellous springs,
And the pride and terror crumble and the awe of the solemn Kings,
Flame in the cramping cities the folk would build again—
For the might of the cup of renewal burns in the hearts of men.
Old loves wail forgotten : a new divine desire
Leaps to the very heaven, a world-consuming fire,
Eager to rend and create, mighty to build and undo.
Dreadful the God, without pity, to make all creatures new.”

DIONYSOS IN INDE

—These are strong to withstand him: the order of day
and night,
The stars and signs of the heavens and the old star-
steadfast Rite
Demon and demon guided, the rabble from afar,
Let them wander and rave as they will, mocked by the
steadfast star
They shall beat in vain at the Khyber, to waken the
ancient war
“Dionysos!”

“He cries in the lonely places to the shepherd on the
hills,
Where the meadows gleam and the lotus lights up the
lowland rills.
He cries in the thronging cities, and the startled folk
draw near
In court and temple and palace and the Kings and their
hosts must hear.
His cup is poured and he cries: ‘Now lies it in your
hand



To drink the wine or reject it: to welcome or withstand:

Yet small my gain from your greeting—yours is the boon or the curse.

Your wise have wailed the seasons and the days that drift to the worse,

And the haunt of the rose grown barren, and the dark that draws apace—

Yet I think it shall be the simple rejoice to see my face: I am Spring and Youth and Renewal: through me they shall not die.

Earth's glory of summer and blossom to laugh against the sky,

I am Strife and Storm, the Destroyer: out of the travail pain

The dying world awakens to glad the Gods again.

Not once I have smitten the nations, and ever out of the fire

The Phoenix has arisen, strong-winged: and the heart's desire

Is yours to be reached and the passion and glory of my wine.

Gather to me ye nations and drain this cup of mine,

DIONYSOS IN INDE

Battle and laugh and create and undo, in the strength
of my might."

We turn to the ancient order, the service of the Rite
And the Gods we know are for ever, unmoved, a
steadfast star,

Nor shall the Land of the Rivers echo his trampling
car:

We hold the rock-girt Khyber and the ancient gates of
war.

"Dionysos!"

1914.

THE LITTLE ANTHOLOGY.

I.

EPITAPH.—AN ACHAEAN SLAIN AT PLATAEA.

PLANETREE and poplar and elm, cool shadow beside
the river,
Springs in the heart of the hills, roofs of the murmur-
ing town,
Comrades of race and wrestle and elders who gazed on
the racing,
Fired in the fleetest of foot, dreams of Olympian
crown ;
Though I return not to you from the war-beaten slopes
of Cithaeron
Your ancient peace shall abide : year after year in
the dell
Spring, enchanted, shall murmur beneath the whisper-
ing poplars
Lads be wistful or blythe that I know not : it is well.

1914.



II.

ON THE TOMB OF ONE LOST AT SEA.

WANDERER, gaze as I gaze, daylong, from my rock-built eyrie,
Over the angry foam, winter wrath of the tides,
Or over the glimmering pools to the murmur of far off waters,
Stretches of reef and wrack, haunts where the sea swallow glides ;
Hateful I held them once as I strove for my life with the tempest,
Thou too shalt forget thy strife ; learn that beauty abides.

1914.

III.

TO ARTEMIS.

A RTEMIS hail ! for the woods are thine and the
sounding of rivers

Breaking beneath the moon : ocean is drawn to thy
spell.

Thine are the forest dwellers, the wolf and otter and
falcon,

Queen of the dreaming dead, Queen by the waters
of Hell.

Threefold thy lordship and holy, but, for me, from afar
I salute thee—

Fragrant and cold the night, stirred by thy virginal
breath ;

But my heart is like fire as I wait in the glimmering
dusk of my chamber

And I cry unto Cypris alone ; little I think upon
death.

1914.

THE GOTHS.

THE LAY OF BRYNHILD.

“**T**HE wind wanders
The Southron ships
My brothers are riding
And my father’s sword
“Gold and gem
O bitter the skald’s praise
Hateful the loom,
Byrnie on breast
“My brothers may ride
A fire on the fells
And my heart is akin
Of the smiting storm,
Odin hearkens
The sleepless sword
Byrnie on breast,
Shall ride the fells
the Western fells,
cleave the storm :
the sea wrath
a flame on the fells.
gleam on my heart—
‘bright in bower’
heavy the load—
were a burden less sore—
the wrath of the foam
my father’s sword
to the high heart
of the smiting sword.”
the high heart,
has set in her hand—
Budli’s daughter
and the wrath of the storm.

THE LAY OF BRYNHILD

The others labour	distaff and loom,
Pour the ale	to the battle proud
Bear the burdens	of garth and bower—
Little their heart	is like Brynhild's heart.
Beats the thunder	o'er the broken battle,
The raven shrieks	in the rain-swept mirk—
But the sword triumphant	is a torch that lights
The victory harvest	the Valkyrs glean.
Who shall tell	of the strife and change,
Mood over-mighty	of the shield may,
The heart that must choose	as the heart listeth
The Valkyr's wrong,	the Valkyr's woe?
Flame on the crest	few may climb,
Circling flame	round the Shield-May's sleep,
All-Father's doom	love and death
Like the faint-heart may's	of field and bower.
This is left	to the lofty hearted
When the charm must be broken,	shattered the sleep—
He that woos,	the Wild-Fire-Rider,
Shall be of all men	boldest and best.

1915.

ANGANTYR.

MIIGHTILY lowering o'er the Frisian surf
And the sea's stir
Glooms on the tide-swept beach the mounded turf
Of Angantyr.

The storm blows all its clarions ; and the sea
Sends forth its cry
As when they blow to battle ; recklessly
Men charge and die.

Across the gleaming sand the maddened tide
Rides in its wrath,
Foam-crested : as unconquerably ride
Kings from the North.

The noon is pale: the Northern tempest swoops
 As war-arrayed.
 Westward across the waste the sunset droops
 A blood-red blade.

Night and the battle wanes: the charging wave
 Dies to a moan;
 The murmuring darkness and the mounded grave
 Brood there alone.

And as a woman seeks her father's place
 Amid the dead,
 The shrouded moon looks through the flickering
 race
 Far overhead.

*A woman cries
 over the barrow.*

In the dark you rest.
 In the uttermost night,
 The doom-heavy sword
 Laid on your heart:
 The barrows height
 Piled on your breast
 I rend apart
 With a woeful word.

The storm swept loud
 O'er the dauntless ones—
 Little they stir
 The stark and tall :
 The sword has thy sons,
 The glory is bowed :
 Unavenged the fall
 Of Angantyr !

And the task is laid
 On a woman's head.
 O awake at the word
 Of my despair—
 I cry to the dead,
 To the dead, for aid,
 You shall hear the prayer.
 The ancient sword !

*The dead makes
 answer from the
 barrow.*

The very heart of the dark that I deemed no storm
 should awaken
 With a voice far off, half heard, insistent, is smitten
 and shaken.

*The woman cries
 again.* The ancient sword !

ANGANTYR

*The voice from
the tomb makes
answer.*

A voice breaks in on the night, age-long, that
weighed on my heart
And, wails: the mounded clay at the cry is riven
apart.

The woman.

The sword, father, the sword.

*The mound is
rent and the
dead rises.*

In the cloud driven moon stands one who beats
at the gate of the dead
And the sleep rolls heavily back that weighed,
vast as the sea, on my head.

The woman.

Father, I call for the sword.

Angantyr.

Is it wife or sister or child that cries so loud to the
deep?
Amazement and agony to break the eternal sleep.

*Hervor tells her
errand to her
father.*

It is I, the last of the line
Hervor, a feeble thing—
Have then the dead no word
Of the sons who fain would wreak
The wrongs of the smitten King?
Their heads lie low as thine,
I am left, desolate, weak,
Father give me the sword.

ANGANTYR

Angantyr.

Wrong, and the wreaking of wrong, and the hate
that was flame in my breast.

All these are dark in the dark and I heed not—let
me rest.

*Hervoř tells of
the triumphing
of the foe.*

Father they pour the wine
And they triumph over the dead
And the song rings loud in the hall
Of the death of Angantyr.
“Unavenged he lies in his bed
And of all the lordly line
There is none left save her
And shall she avenge his fall?”

Angantyr.

Your cry tears at my heart: let our house fare
well or ill

I can neither heed it nor aid: let me rest and
Doom drive as it will.

*Hervoř remembers
the ancient love of
father and child.*

Though you have drained death's wine
And forgotten the ancient foe:
Yet, to my agony,
I live, I may not forget.
Hearken, at least, my woe,
Thy child, the last of thy line
Overborne: and my heart is set
On a task too great for me.

Is this thing also forgotten
That once, whate'er I would crave
I found thy hands more swift
To give, than my lips to the word?
Is this also dark in the grave,
And the love of the late begotten?
One prayer, the last: the sword
To avenge: no other gift.

Angantyr. Not twice, O child, may we speak in the drift of
the cloud-swept moon
And the dead have little to give, and you ask a
bitter boon.

Hervor. I ask for the sword.

Angantyr. I have found the snare of the sword: I smote and
laughed o'er the slain,
Two-edged the ancient iron and the stroke crashes
home again.

Hervor. It is mine by right, the sword.

ANGANTYR

Angantyr. Heavy and grievous the doom, to give the heart
of a maid
To slaying and blood avenging: death broods in
the blade.

*Hervor chooses as
her blood and
ancient kin bid
her.*

I have drunk the lees of pain—
What is there left to bear
Though I choose the iron part?
Let me smite once as I would,
Little I fear the snare
Or the death hurled home again—
Father, I share your blood
Shall I not share your heart?

*Angantyr is
weary of her
beseeching.*

Grievous the broken sleep, cloud drift and the
surf's roar
And your pleading agony: let me rest—I can
strive no more.

Hervor. I have chosen. I choose the sword.

Angantyr. Once more I speak: the last: my child will you
not hear?
Grievous doom in the sword, and my heart is
heavy with fear.

ANGANTYR

Hervor. I am constant, father; the sword.

*Angantyr at the
last yields the
sword.* In vain I would spare you: the night drives back
and tears us apart,

I can strive no more with doom: take the blade
from my heart.

.

The dying storm murmurs across the sea:
Westward the shattered moon droops heavily,
Cloud-thronged and weary, to the restless wave,
Dark on the utter darkness looms the grave.
Night triumphs: save beneath the mounded height
The sea-foam glimmers ghost-like in the night.

The hours that lead the morning shall unfold
Their pageant of triumphant flame and gold.
Day thunders Eastward and the wind of day
Smites into wrath the sullen seas and gray.
Day rides the heaven, and day shall bring to birth
All joy and grief and wonder upon earth
The wind and sea awake and hearts of men
To take their doom of storm and strife again,

ANGANTYR

The ships race down the foam and the kings ride
Helmed, and the sleeping death couched at their side,
The churl takes up his task in field and byre
And the whole world pursues the heart's desire
High-hearted, or with sail or sword or plough ;
But darkness broods across the lonely Howe,
Dark o'er the barren sands and the sea's stir,
And darkness on the heart of Angantyr.

1913.

THE NORSEMEN.

THE ice and iron of the bitter North
Were fast about their house : their coming forth
Was down the path and driving of the sleet.
The sun was faint to them, the summer fleet
No spring with music in the budded leaf
And in the summer days unsure and brief
They forced from narrow lands and perilous sea,
With toil a scanty harvest perilously ;
And on the hills that girt the barren stead,
With winter dark, with fire of sunset red,
They see unchanged, while light is born and dies,
The horror of unvintageable ice.

Because



Because our woven garment of deceit—
Sweet birds a-singing in the hawthorn sweet
In spring, that sets a song in every mouth
And all the lying glamour of the South,
Laughter and magic of the warm moonshine,
Rose and love dreaming and enchanted wine—
Because all this was stripped, as the storm strips
The flaunting pennons from the smitten ships,
In the cold Northern daylight they saw clear
How empty hope, how less than empty fear.
They saw the day how brief, the night how long,
The purpose faint, how stark the groping wrong,
Man's lighted world how narrow, and how wide
The untrodden dark where all dark things abide,
With what grim toil the high Gods keep at bay
The desperate leaguer of the haunts of day,
How at their side the shades of men outworn
Battle to hold the perilous pass of morn
And, overborne, with agony maintain
The high adventure of the world, in vain.

God

God beat aback the Wolf a little space
To build his dream—a little moment's grace,
Before the drifting dark should turn and hide
His work, as children's battlements the tide.
Grim-hearted, Odin wrought, till for their hour
The burning pinnacles of Godholme tower,
Walled in with cliff and forest mightily
Girt with the beating of the outer sea,
With ice and fog and darkness, and on high
Roofed with the ordered changes of the sky.
O great and stark he made his hall divine ;
He clad the walls with multitudinous pine,
The wind-tormented crown of the wild hill,
Torrent and storm obeyed his craftsman's will—
No delicate rose-hidden Southern house
But mountain-built, with high seat mountainous
Granite : and sits and drinks the festal ale
With those high spirits who know that all things fail
Save valour, and the unconquerable heart,
Who watch, while all the lights from heaven depart
Unmoved, the death and passage of the day ;
There, while beneath his stalwart housecarles play,
He sits and broods the deeds that must befall
Until the hour that brings the end of all.

THE NORSEMEN

O hearts a ruined battle could not break,
Who might indeed despair, but not forsake
In the eclipse and silence of the sun,
The cause of day eternally undone,
Who of us all, as you, is resolute
Mid all defeat and terror to refute
The ancient lie that bids us live at ease
And let the years bring evil as they please
And strive not? You were great indeed, but we
Ask Doom to bribe our swords with victory:
You nursed no hopes like ours: you smote in vain
And held the losing battle worth the pain,
Invulnerable; until at last One came
Strong even your heroic hearts to tame—
As spring comes, when the winds of April blow,
Faint spring and soft, to melt the iron floe
And set the forests and the waters free
And hurl the streams headforemost to the sea—
Like spring unarmed and helmed with stubborn thorn
That melts to laughing leaf; and every morn
Sees new fantastic blossoms sally forth
And strange birds thronging to the broken North . . .

It was found impossible to complete this poem for more reasons than one. The intention was to conclude with a reference to the contribution of a people of Norse blood to the Mediæval Renaissance, and to the achievements of Norman knights in the First Crusade.

1912.

GYDA.

THEY tell of a may in Harald's hall
Gracious, and high of heart, and tall,
“Woo me the fairest may of all!”
(Ride on the wooing of Gyda)

“Gifts and gold he lays at your feet,
Bids you sit in a Queen's high seat;
Lucky the hap of Harald's sweet.”
(Lucky the hap of Gyda)

“Light I hold your offering
And Harald's love no glorious thing—
Narrow lands and a little King—
(High the mood of Gyda)

Note.—The “y” in “Gyda” is pronounced as the French “u.”

“Let him master Northern land,
Nidaross to Sögn strand :
Set all Norway under his hand—
(War in the heart of Gyda)

“Take my answer and homeward ride—
My pride mates with a King’s pride
Who rules all Norway far and wide.”
(Ah, the pride of Gyda)

Harald laughed and sware an oath
“I take the challenge, little loath,
I give my troth against her troth.”
(Plighted troth of Gyda)

East and West they sally forth—
Who shall stand before Harald’s wrath
Starkest sword in all the North?
(Swords ablaze for Gyda)

Harald

Harald rides over Northern land,
Nidaross to Sögn strand,
Norway laid beneath his hand.
(Morning gift for Gyda)

Dreamers dream of the kings to be
Crowned and ruling mightily—
First of the mighty line is he.
(Lulled on the breast of Gyda)

Gyda fondles Harald's son—
O the tale to-day begun—
The starest line beneath the sun.
(And the mother of all—Queen Gyda)

1913.

THE ADVENTURER.

A KESAR rules in Micklegard,
 In gold his house-carles shine ;
He seeks strong arms for service,
 And a strong arm is mine.
Grim his feuds, and his foemen wroth—
He will need swords when he sallies forth
Swords like mine, from the iron North—
 Farewell to Whitewater !
I sail for Micklegard.

It's a strong place, is Micklegard
 Great and stark its wall.
But they need swords to keep the place
 Be the towers never so tall.
There's many are fain to win the hold—
Spoil and to spare of the gathered gold—
Watch less your raids be overbold !
 Farewell to Whitewater !
I sail for Micklegard.

It's

It's good to cross the world betimes
When eye and steel are keen,
East and South is a fine faring,
And the whole world lies between ;
Strange cities to see, new friends to find—
O the world and the winds are more to my mind !
Barren the land I leave behind—
Farewell to Whitewater !
I sail for Micklegard.

There's pride enow in Micklegard,
Pomp and pride to spare ;
I have my pride in Northern blood
To keep my honour there—
None who drinks the Kesar's wine
For all his carven sword hilt shine
Shall wear a blade more bleak than mine—
Farewell to Whitewater !
I sail for Micklegard.

There's not room here for a sword sweep ;
My dreams weary me ;
High hearts in a narrow land
Between mountain and sea.
Through the heaths where I was bred
Whitewater runs in a stony bed
From barren stead to barren stead ;
O farewell to Whitewater !
I sail for Micklegard.

There's no white Christ in Micklegard
To stay the swing of the sword ;
Deeds to do, and gold for the doing
From the Kesar's hoard—
O the ravens swoop from a burning sky
And the sound of swords goes up on high—
Who were more glad at heart than I ?
Farewell to Whitewater !
I sail for Micklegard !

I shall

I shall not pine in Micklegard
For the sleet and the North land ;
I shall win my place with outland lords
By strength of hand.
Honour and wealth are the stake of war—
Skerry and heath and lonely shore
And driving firth—I shall come no more—
Farewell to Whitewater !
I sail for Micklegard.

1911.

THE NORMANS.

MONTROUGE.

BLEAK Montrouge in the winter tide,
Listless and heavy the long days glide :
Barren and bleak the countryside :
I hearken the sea on the barren shore,
And gaze on the hills and the drifted snow
And I weary for spring when the swift streams flow.
And the lists are pitched and the wild horns blow
War !

Grim Montrouge in the sunniest weather,
Castle and moorland matched together,
Barren rock on the barren heather.
Narrow and sheer the track
That leads from the harbour to my hold :
O ! the sunset over the sea unrolled
And my towers that stand against the gold
Black.

Leagues

Leagues over hill, leagues over down
They drink and ruffle in Rouen town,
Laugh their fill at the crafty clown,
The jongleur fiddles his lay
To lord and lady merry of cheer,
A tale of Tristram or Guinevere—
Leagues of rain between Rouen and here,
Gray.

O in Rouen a merry throng :
Here, one rogue knows Roland's song,
Somewhat ancient and overlong,
I were fain of a blither tune.
My sergeants wrangle and drink all day
And I . . . I kill the hours as they—
Oh ! we were blither at Tenchebrai
Last June !

• • • • • • •

In his castle leagues away
Broodeth Richard Yea-and-Nay
And he hates as I the empty day,
Wearies of sleep and wine,
Broods and chafes as the great cups brim,
And the blood runs wild in every limb :
Like as hound on leash the heart of him,
As mine.

Once let Spring set Richard free
To hurl his riders oversea—
Swords are out in Normandy
As soon as the thrushes sing.
Montrouge gates flung open wide,
East and South by horsemen ride :
For me—I care not on which side.

Spring !

1914.

THE CRUSADERS.

1204.

A CRE scowls on the blue water,
The Templars keep the hold;—
We sailed, for Acre, ten thousand strong
And our galleys aflower with gold.
We turned on another errand
Than that lured us from home—
Acre may fall and welcome—
War!
On the Emperor of Rome.

The last hold in the Holy Land
Trodden by Christ's fair feet—
They are pressed, hard pressed in Acre
And the watchmen look for the fleet.
Long they may look and wearily
Across the empty foam—
We turned aside at the Cyclades,
War
On the Emperor of Rome!

Kerak stands sheer, where Sodom stood
In a waste of deadly sand :
Not ours to ride by the Bitter Sea
On the accursed strand.
All the mosques of the infidel
Have no such sapphire dome
As the shrine we'll sack, by the Golden Horn—
War
On the Emperor of Rome !

There's treason in the city
And a high queen betrayed.
Her wrong calls out across the world
And swords are swift to aid :
Alone she sits in the donjon tower
Plying her jewelled comb—
The spoil of a thousand years for the aiding !
War
On the Emperor of Rome !

O we

O we sail with the Venice galleys
And the high lord Dandalo—
Who heeds the barren Holy Land
And the heathen foe?
O, burned and bare is the Holy Land
On other roads we roam,
A wilder venture, a fairer spoil—
The loot
Of the Emperor of Rome!

1911.

THE KESAR OF BYZANT.

1204.

H ALLOWED God's riders, and the cross their sign
The stark Crusaders set the prisoner free
And bring him to his ancient sovrainty,
The heritage of his imperial line :
Joy in Byzant and feast : the torches shine,
The dim vast domes and gaunt mosaics see
KyrAAC resume, with orient pageantry,
The purple and the crown of Constantine.

Eyeless and old and broken : yet restored
He comes, past hoping, into his desire,
Blind to the glitter of the banquet board,
The courtiers worshipping, the jewelled fire,
Blind where, impassive, waiting for his hire
His iron ally leans upon his sword.

1912.

MANSOURAH.

AN EPISODE OF ST. LOUIS' CRUSADE.

THE squalid ferry, choking with the slain
Stank, and the sun in heaven was merciless.

Here, where the dust shielded the eddying press,
The Mameluke whirled back and charged again :
Nacaire and tamour roared : like poisonous rain
The arrows pelted on the battle dress.

How the day went elsewhere was hard to guess
Mansourah blazed across the farther plain.

Lo ! clarions from the causeway on the right,

And the King's battle, pausing in advance
Like some strong eagle poised in middle flight !

Louis, a head above his tallest lord,

O'erlooks the field, gold helmed, with naked sword
And on his surcoat burn the flowers of France.

1912.

LOUIS XI.

WAR in the land or treachery?
The palace gates are grim to see
And the guard of outland soldiery—

Night, and the torches burning red
Swords around the old King's bed—
Who knows, outside, if alive or dead?

Silence, and swords in the palace gate:
Breathless, afraid, the nations wait
News of the King whose craft was as Fate.
Louis, King Louis is dying.

Vain, men said, to seek the gold
Once grasped in King Louis' hold—
At morn, another tale is told.

East and West the riders bear
The offerings of a King's despair—
No gift grudged to buy a prayer.

Gold

Gold and gifts in sacrifice,
Gold and jewels beyond price—
What worth gold to a man that dies ?
Louis, King Louis, is dying.

Charles rode out of Burgundy
And his men at arms were proud to see—
France the price of victory.

Subtle and deadly is the snare
Louis weaves in his lonely lair—
Vain to bid Duke Charles beware !

Sold and trapped and brought to bay,
Charles charged home through the mellay :
Charles died : King Louis' turn to-day,
Louis, King Louis, is dying.

At Amboise also a guard in the gate—
A little longer, Francis, to wait
Dauphin Francis, be still and wait,
Louis, King Louis, is dying.

1914.

THE COMMUNE.

THE PAWNS.

It was reported in the Press a few years ago that a certain Bishop, opening a chess tournament, stated that he might well be interested in the game, for he had been Chaplain to a King and a Queen, he lived in a Castle, he was a Bishop and his brother was a Knight; in fact, the only piece on the board with which he had not a first-hand acquaintance was the Pawn.

The Pawns are the soul of Chess.—*Philidor.*

PURPLE robed, with crowned hair,
Cæsar sits in a golden chair,
And a proud cold Queen beside him there.
Knights in armour, many and tall,
And the holy Bishops throng the hall;
Why trouble your head with the pawns at all,
Iscariot?

He sits at the chess and he plays with skill
On a board far flung over river and hill,
And many a pawn works out his will.
At the chess of war to be bold is wise,
And little he recks of sacrifice:—
For what are a pawn or two in our eyes,
Iscariot?

THE PAWNS

Years agone, and a world away
Lived One who did not praise the play,
And He loved the pawns the best, men say.
And He damned the pieces for their pride :
So you sold Him to be crucified,
And bared unto the spear His side,
Iscariot ?

You sold Him and you thought Him slain,
And the old proud game begins again,
And Cæsar plays with might and main.
But a hidden Player has the Black,
And the craft is foiled and the White attack,
Move by move is beaten back,
Iscariot.

Knight nor Bishop can resist
The pawns of this Antagonist
Whose countenance is dark with mist.
The game goes on and will not wait,
Cæsar is gripped in a deadly strait—
What if the pawns should give checkmate,
Iscariot ?

1911.

THE RIDER ON THE RED HORSE.

JUNE, 1916.

“ **R**ED morn, send forth thy torches—break away
The vast and cloudy panoplies of night ;
Upon a world’s avenging send the light !
Behold, O flame of steel ! thy royal prey
The pomp and heraldries of their array,
The cursed gold with which their kings are dight
The armour adamantine : and their might
Shall be as dust before the close of day.”

Save where there burns the sunset thunder-red
Dark falls like dew across a silent plain
Where gold and adamant have been in vain
And all in vain their pride and hardihead ;
Where paladins are dust amid the dead
And ancient kingdoms buried with the slain.

1916.

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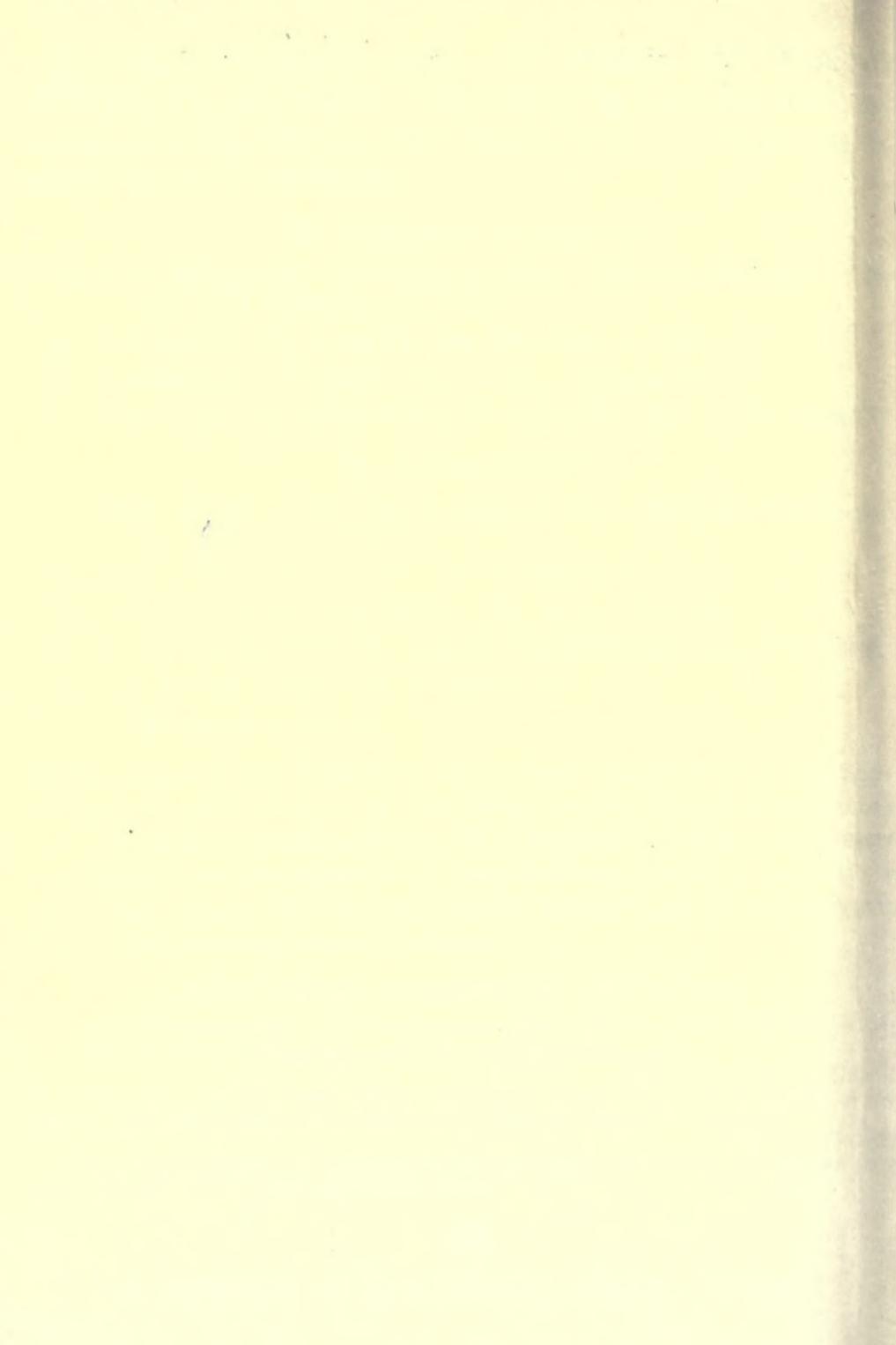
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